DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 188 074 CG 014 471

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TITLE Interpersonal Influence Styles of Adult Cohorts.
PUB DATE 79
NOTE 10p.: Paper presented at the Annual Scientific Meeting of the Gerontological Society (32nd, Washington, DC, November 25-29, 1979). Best copy available.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adults; *Age Differences; Behavior Patterns; Cohort Analysis; Cultural Influences; *Individual Power; *Influences; *Interaction; *Interpersonal Relationship; Psychological Patterns; Research Projects; *Social Behavior
IDENTIFIERS *Likelihood of Influence Tactic Use Scale

ABSTRACT

Generational differences in the balance of power contribute to varying patterns of influence strategy use within cohorts of young, middle-aged, and older adults. The self-report Likelihood of Influence Tactic Use Scale was administered to 10 males and 10 females in each of three cohort groups to investigate the influence tactics used at different age levels. Respondents rated their likelihood to use influence tactics in intimate, parent, child and best-friend relationships. Younger adults were most likely to use influence tactics in all relationships. Middle-aged adults used influence most with their children. Older adults used influence tactics most in their intimate relationships. Indirect/emotional strategies were employed more frequently by females. Adult children and elderly parents had difficulty directly influencing each other and resorted to indirect/emotional strategies. All cohorts used direct/rational strategies most often with friends, less often with intimates and least often with parents. Overall, there was much similarity in influence styles by cohorts, genders and in relationships. Results suggest that influencing is a function of both culturally socialized behavioral predispositions and the power differential of individuals in a relationship. (Author/NRB)

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INTERPERSONAL INFLUENCE STYLES OF ADULT COHORTS

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Paper presented at the 32nd Annual Gerontological Society Meeting

CG 014471

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Cohort differences in interpersonal influence processes is an area of human behavior little explored empirically. Theorists have devoted much thought to dimensionalizations of influence (although influence often takes a back seat to issues of power). Some developmental studies exist, especially in early childhood and recently in examinations of intergenerational family relationships (Boxer, 1979; Wood, Weinstein, & Parker, 1967). Studies of influence processes in unicohort samples also have been conducted. For example, Falbo's 1977 study of the influence tactics of undergraduates is perhaps the first attempt to derive an inductive structure of such tactics. Falbo asked college-aged students to respond to the topic "How I get my way". Such responses were content analyzed to yield 16 discrete tactics. Expert judges rated their similarity and by means of MDS, two bipolar dimensions were derived.

The study to be discussed is based on Falbo's work but expands it to a) develop a more developmentally valid list of interpersonal influence tactics; b) examine differential use of such tactics in various significant relationships; and c) examine sex and cohort differences in likelihood of tactic use. The research is based on a conceptual framework involving the impact of changing sex roles; the costs of utilizing specific tactics; certain maturational differences in interpersonal processes; and the effect of particular power imbalances within significant relationships. Specifically, it was proposed that generational differences in balance of power within certain significant relationships have contributed to a varying pattern of influence strategy use within three cohorts of young, middle-aged and older adults. This power imbalance permits easier, less costly influence tactics (usually the more direct, less emotional tactics) to be utilized by the more powerful interactant. Also, it is assumed that the changes in sex roles and concomitant interpersonal behaviors over time have contributed to a varying pattern of gender behaviors across the three generations.

In general, it was proposed that younger cohorts would use more direct, rational influence strategies than the oldest cohort; that males would be more likely to be direct and rational in their influencing than females (except in the youngest cohort); and that in the marital and parent/child relationship, the changes in balance of power across the three generations would contribute to a varying pattern of influence tactic usage.

Method of procedure

Before these hypotheses were tested, a more complete list of influence tactics adding to Falbo's original 16 (see Table 1) was derived. Ninety persons, 30 in each cohort and 15 of each gender, were interviewed in depth about how they got their way in their close relationships during times of conflict over behaviors, norms, and personality differences. The responses were content analyzed and an additional 23 tactics were added, for a total of 39 tactics (see Table 1).

Similar to Falbo's procedure, a panel of expert judges rated the pairwise similarity of these tactics and a MDS scaling procedure was used. No simple dimensional scheme was derived, however. Falbo's two dimensions of direct/indirect and rational/nonrational were then used by the judges to rate each of the 39 tactics. If consensus on ratings was achieved, a tactic was then placed into one of four quadrants known as strategies: direct/rational (dry), direct/emotional (hot), indirect/rational (sly), and indirect/emotional (warm) (see Table 2). Tactics were collapsed into strategies for use in subsequent data analyses.

The 39 tactics were incorporated into an LITU Scale (Likelihood of Influence Tactic Use Scale). Respondents were asked to rate their likelihood of using each tactic on a four-point scale of not at all likely to very likely, for each of four significant extant relationships: intimate, parent, child, and best friend. As a criterion validity index, respondents were also asked to designate whether they had or had not used a tactic on two self-reported occasions of influence in the past year in each of their designated relationships.

Ten males and ten females in each birth cohort participated in this study. The young adult sample was derived from university undergraduates, middle-aged adults from classes, jobs, and exercise salons, and older adults from jobs, a retirement apartment house, and from a retired teachers' roster. All subjects were Caucasian and middle-class. Young adults were between the ages of 18 - 21, middle-aged from 30 - 45, and old from 60 - 80.

Data analysis

Convergent validity of the LITU Scale was determined by biserial correlation of the actual tactic use scale with the LITU scale. Correlations were low, but poor results may have been due to social desirability biases in reporting actual behaviors, and limited use of behaviors in only two occasions of influence. Content validity was high and reliability of subscales (the four strategies explained previously) was moderately high.

The LITU Scale was analyzed by a repeated measures analysis of variance SAS program (with relationships being the repeated measure, cohort and gender the two other independent variables). Dependent variables were likelihood of use scores for each of the four strategy subscales and an additional subscale of noninfluence tactics. Subscale scores were standardized by dividing through by total score to control for response set bias.

Results

Total influencing. In terms of the likelihood of influencing by means of the sum total of influence tactics, it was expected that males would have higher total scores than females and that middle-aged adults would have higher total scores than the young or old cohort. Also, in the parent/child relationship (traditionally conceptualized as the socializing relationship), more influencing will occur than in any other relationship. Interactions between variables will modify these global hypotheses. For instance, young males and females are expected to be comparable in their likelihood of influencing, because of the stronger impact on this cohort of societal changes in sex role norms. Additionally, the parent/child relationship for the oldest cohort switches the balance of power, and thus for the oldest cohort, more influencing will probably occur in the intimate relationship. Thus, cohort x gender and cohort x relationship interactions were predicted for total amount of influencing. However, only the cohort x relationship interaction was significant ($p < .029$). Across all relationships, the younger cohorts are reporting the greatest likelihood for influencing. In all relationships, young adults are equally high influencers. Middle-aged adults influence most with their children, less with parents and intimates, and even less with best friends. The oldest cohort is most likely to influence in their intimate relationship, and significantly less with their best friends.

Analysis of Individual Strategies

Indirect/Rational and Direct/Emotional Strategies. There were no differences in likelihood of tactic use in the sly (IR) and hot (DE) strategies. Subjects in all cohorts, genders, and close relationships were equally likely to use these strategies, although this refuted several hypotheses. Perhaps a reluctance to report being likely to use these tactics held across all cohorts, and thus all were equally low in their reporting of their likelihood of using these less socially desirable ways of influencing.

Indirect/Emotional Strategy. It was expected that females across all cohorts would be more likely to use warm tactics (tactics falling into the indirect/emotional strategy and rather costly to employ because of requiring much cognitive analysis of the partner's susceptibilities and also because of emotional drain). This hypothesis was supported ($p < .005$). A cohort x relationship interaction also held ($p < .03$). Young and old adults show no significant differences across relationships in their use of warm tactics. Middle-aged adults report the most likelihood of using warm tactics with parents and intimates, less with children and best friends. With their intimates, young use more warm tactics than do middle-aged adults. With their parents, young and middle-aged adults do not differ in their use of warm tactics. With their children, the old use more warm tactics than the middle-aged. With their best

friends, the young use more warm tactics than the middle-aged. The only anomalous finding here is that the middle-aged use more warm tactics in their marriages than in some other close relationships, although less than young adults do. In combination with the other other finding of high use of dry tactics in middle-aged marriages, it appears that marriage is an arena for use of many different tactics of influence for the middle-aged. This must be tempered with the reminder that for total influencing, middle-aged adults are most likely to influence their children than anyone else close to them.

The Direct/Rational Strategy. For the dry strategy, a cohort x relationship interaction was significant ($p < .04$). There is a very similar pattern of use across relationships reported by all cohorts: young adults report greatest likelihood of using dry tactics with friends, less likelihood with intimates, and least with parents. Middle-aged adults also report the same pattern, as do older adults. However, the level of use of dry tactics within a relationship varies by cohort. In the intimate relationship, middle-aged adults are significantly more likely to use dry tactics than either older or younger cohorts. With their parents, young and middle-aged adults do not differ in their likelihood of using dry tactics. With their children, middle-aged adults use significantly more dry tactics than older adults do. And in the friend relationship, as in the intimate relationship, middle-aged adults report using significantly more dry tactics than do young or old adults. In analyzing this pattern of findings, it appears that across all cohorts dry tactics are more likely to be utilized in relationships with equitable power structures, such as in best friend relationships and in some marriages. The middle-aged cohort, because of their greater number of resources, is also able to employ this less costly strategy in more of their relationships. Interestly, middle-aged adults appear to have either more equitable marriages than younger or older persons, or because of "disenchantment" (Pineo, 1961) might have marriages more like friendships. Middle-aged adults more than older adults also use dry tactics with their children, as middle-aged parents possess more resources than older parents. Middle-aged friendships also appear to more equitable than friendships of young or older adults, if use of dry tactics can be assumed to be a function of equal power resources in a relationship.

Discussion

In general, it appears that influencing is a function of both culturally socialized behavioral predispositions and the power differential of individuals in a relationship. Also, it appears that the youngest cohort is more likely than middle aged or older cohorts to influence in all their relationships, although often they must use tactics that are costly to them in order to do this. Specifically, these are the warm tactics (such as joking, pretense, guilt, or sarcasm). Middle aged adults in all their relationships are less likely to use warm tactics, although they use most such tactics with their parents. Their elderly parents are also most likely to use these tactics with their middle aged children. It seems that both adult children and old parents have a difficult time directly influencing each other and so must resort to these indirect means. The use of dry tactics, the most direct and least costly of all influence modes, is least likely with parents and with adult children.

Females, true to stereotype, were more likely than males to use warm tactics. This would suggest that the effect of early socializing experience teaching sex typed behavior is resistent to current cultural trends to instrumentalize female behaviors. Even the youngest cohort of females, less practiced in sex typing, made use of indirect tactics. It might be expected, however, that future cohorts of women may begin to utilize these tactics less frequently. Whether the use of warm influence tactics is a real genetic/biological sex difference and therefore resistant to cultural impact must be studied through cross-sequential research designs.

The most surprising outcome of this study, however, was the similarity in influence styles by cohorts, genders, and in relationships. There were few differences in likelihood of using most of the influence strategies. The self-reported likelihood of use of hot, sly tactics was typically low, and the use of dry or warm tactics was for the most part high. On the surface, this looks like a social desirability bias in reporting low use of these socially noncondoned behaviors. Observation of influencing, although difficult, may yield a more realistic assessment of the range of behaviors actually employed during influence occasions. However, perhaps the study respondents do have more success when utilizing less punitive tactics (costly in terms of their negative affective impact) and less emotional tactics (costly in terms of emotional drain), and so do actually employ dry, warm tactics much more frequently than sly, hot tactics to get their way. According to exchange theory, we want to maximize our gains and minimize our costs in interaction (Homans, 1974). In influencing, costs can certainly be high. We have seen that people do tend to employ less costly tactics when the power differential of the relationship permits. However, the context of the relationship does have much control over the tactics that are likely to be utilized.

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TABLE 1

INFLUENCE TACTICS

Name	Example
*assertion:	I voice my wishes loudly.
*bargain:	I tell them I'll do something for them if they do something for me.
reward:	They believe I can say or do something nice for them
*compromise:	Often, we compromise.
judge:	I tell them they're not being fair.
*deceit:	I find that flattery often works.
*emotion-agent:	I put on a sweet face; I try to sound sincere.
punish:	They believe I can do or say something unpleasant to them.
false front:	I present myself as being more together than I really am.
*expertise:	They believe I am knowledgeable in such matters.
pretense:	I pretend it doesn't matter much.
personal ID:	They believe we should see eye-to-eye on these matters.
*emotion-target:	I try to put them in a good mood.
*evasion:	I can do what I want as long as they don't find out about it.
*fait accompli:	I do what I want anyway.
*hint:	I drop hints; I subtly bring up the point.
*nag:	I often nag, but it works.
authority:	They believe I have the right to the final say.
*persuade:	I ask them to do it in a nice way; I coax or say please.
*reason:	I argue logically; I tell all the reasons why my way is best.
helplessness:	They know I need them to help me out.
*simple statement:	I simply tell them what I want.
cry:	I cry.
argue:	I yell or argue angrily.
sarcasm:	I use sarcasm or exaggeration.
evaluation:	I tell them they're acting childish or foolish.
guilt:	I try to gain sympathy or make them feel guilty.
moral appeal:	I tell them it's the moral thing to do.
coalition:	I try to get others on my side.
intercede:	I ask others to intercede for me.
coercion:	I hit, spank, or throw things to get my point across.
example:	I influence by example.
experience:	I tell them it's good for them.
*threat:	I tell them I'll do something drastic if they don't do what I want.
silent treatment:	I use the silent treatment.
yield:	I give in.
*thought manipulate:	I try to make them think it's their idea.
avoid:	I avoid the situation.

*Asterisked tactics were included in Falbo's original list of 16, although in some cases in a slightly different form.

Note — In the LITU scale, tactic names were not utilized. Some tactic examples were phrased in such a way as to encourage reporting of their use in the case of socially undesirable tactics (e.g., nag, deceit).

TABLE 2

QUADRANT STRATEGIES

SLY	DRY	WARM	HOT	NON
false front	compromise	emotion-agent	assertion	fait accompli
hint	bargain	emotion-target	judge	evasion
coalition	reason	joke	nag	give in
example	simple statement	sarcasm	cry	avoid
intercede		evaluation	argue	
thought manipulate		silent treatment	coercion	
		guilt	threat	
		pretense		